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AUTHOR Goldstein, Cynthia
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ABSTRACT

The American birth control movement was born among radicals, mostly socialist women, early in the twentieth century. Although some information about birth control had circulated in medical journals, books and advertising in the nineteenth century, the passage in 1873 of a federal obscenity law known as the Comstock law resulted in the absence of information about birth control in nonmedical media. Birth control proponents, such as William and Margaret Sanger and Emma Goldman, then used and created their own publications by means of the radical press, which provided press coverage of birth control and the heroes and martyrs of the movement. A profound change in American attitudes toward birth control occurred in the early twentieth century. Late nineteenth century moral revulsion became disinterested acceptance. The true context of the movement received media attention only in the radical press, however. Progressivism, a product of Victorian values, did not go beyond those values. The progressive movement as inherently conservative in its attempts to make American institutions function properly served as a catalyst for the anarchistic rebellion of the birth control movement. The radical press recognized contraception as antagonistic to progressivism rather than accepting it as a delayed part or result of progressivism. That press perceived progressivism as dealing with only the symptoms, as opposed to the causes, of poverty. However, the radical press did function as both informer and persuader in its coverage of the birth control movement. (DF)

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History Division

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THE RADICAL PRESS AND THE BEGINNING OF THE BIRTH CONTROL MOVEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES

by

Cynthia Goldstein

University of Northern Iowa
Cedar Falls, Iowa 50614

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Presented to the History Division at the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication Annual Convention in Memphis, Tennessee, August 3-6, 1985

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Cynthia Goldstein
Assistant Professor
University of Northern Iowa
Cedar Falls, Iowa 50614

ABSTRACT

The American birth control movement was born among political radicals, mostly socialist women, early in the twentieth century. While some information about birth control had circulated in medical journals, in books and in newspaper advertising in the nineteenth century, the passage in 1873 of a federal obscenity law, known as the Comstock law after its chief proponent and enforcer, resulted in the absence of information on birth control in nonmedical media. So birth control proponents used and created their own publications, the radical press. Virtually all of the radical press coverage of birth control was favorable; it reported in great detail on the heroes and martyrs of the movement and explained how they were fighting for the freedom of all Americans to control their own fertility.

A profound change in American attitudes toward birth control occurred in the early twentieth century. Late nineteenth century moral revulsion became disinterested acceptance. The true context of the movement received media attention only in the radical press, however. Progressivism, a product of Victorian values, did not go beyond those values. The progressive movement as inherently conservative in its attempts to make American institutions function properly served as a catalyst for the anarchistic rebellion of the birth control movement. The radical press recognized contraception as antagonistic to progressivism rather than accepting it as a delayed part or result of progressivism. That press perceived progressivism as dealing with only the symptoms, as opposed to the causes, of poverty.

Presented to the History Division at the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication Annual Convention in Memphis, Tennessee, August 3-6, 1985

The Radical Press and the Beginning of the Birth Control Movement in the United States

The birth control movement in the United States began early in the twentieth century. While some information about birth control had circulated in medical journals, in books and in newspaper advertising in the nineteenth century, the passage in 1873 of a federal obscenity law, known as the Comstock law after its chief proponent and enforcer, Anthony Comstock, resulted in the absence of information on birth control in nonmedical media. In the first decade of the twentieth century, references to "family limitation" (by those in favor) and "race suicide" (by those opposed) began to appear in newspapers and magazines in response to census data showing declining birth rates in America. Emma Goldman, an anarchist, and William J. Robinson, a radical physician, promoted birth control among as many of their sympathizers as they could reach. Their work and press references suggested that people were using birth control; however, its use apparently was common only among educated, financially comfortable people and was rare among other Americans.[1]

In the second decade of the century, a supporter of Margaret Sanger's coined the phrase "birth control" when Sanger began her campaign to break, as opposed to change, the Comstock and "little Comstock" laws, as the state laws patterned after the federal law were called. With the goal of democratizing birth control, she produced and distributed birth control literature, spoke about birth control to public gatherings and eventually opened the first birth control clinic. Most of her work centered in New York City, but she traveled around the country several times on speaking tours and inspired the formation of birth control groups in a number of cities. Other people organized birth control groups also, working primarily on amending or repealing the restrictive

laws. By 1920, although no laws had been changed, birth control was receiving more acceptance as a subject of conversation and medical practice, and enforcement of the existing laws was petering out.

Sanger's direct challenge of the laws led to birth control becoming a comfortable subject for press coverage. Four press groups--government, professional, popular and radical--covered the beginning of the birth control movement very differently. The coverage seemed to depend in part on the perceptions of the groups in terms of their roles in relationship to birth control and to their audience. For example, the government press mentioned contraception only once in twenty years of publications. The government press was doing its part to obey its own laws and protect people from the obscenity of contraception. The professional press always provided a theoretical, abstract perspective, although in 1915 it also began covering events in the movement. Coverage in the professional press waned around 1918, once the movement was well established. The popular press gave sporadic coverage to the movement, except for one series in Harper's Weekly and except for the years 1916 and 1917, the height of activity. Within that group, however, coverage varied tremendously. The New York Times always referred to "Mrs. Sanger" or "Miss Goldman," even in headlines, while the Atlanta Constitution referred to "Birth Control Women" or "That Birth Control Woman." The radical press often discussed birth control and regularly asked readers to write, talk and contribute money in the name of contraception. The radical press was doing its part to encourage disobedience of a law it perceived as unjust. The letters to the editor indicated success in persuading new people.

The radical press includes books and journals by people who labeled themselves socialists or anarchists. The audience for these publications was not only socialists and anarchists but also others open-minded enough to

consider new ideas no matter who the proponents. The radical press covered the events of the birth control movement as they occurred. Writers for the professional and popular press did not contribute to the radical press, however. Thus, opinion in these publications was generally uniform, with some variation between socialists and anarchists.

This paper is in three sections. The first section provides background on the birth control movement in America. The second and third sections narrate the history of the birth control movement according to the radical press. Material from more recent sources supplements and ties together the contemporary material. The press coverage of the movement extends from 1900 to 1915, the period of development, through 1916 to 1920, the period of establishment. The second section covers the period of development, and the third section covers the period of establishment.

Background

The American birth control movement was born among political radicals, mostly socialist women. Working women, especially immigrants, were the core of the socialist women's movement. These women had counterparts among reformers, mostly native-born American women with few or no children. These reformers became the core of the progressive movement. Progressivism was a fairly conservative, traditional movement. While change, muckraking and reform characterize its image, its goal was restoring American institutions to health through increased popular control of government.[2] Although the image is liberal, the goal is conservative--especially compared to the anarchists' goal of destroying established institutions, particularly government.

Although birth control had proponents in America throughout the nineteenth century, "private" is the word which best characterizes the sex life of the Victorians, most of whom would have been unlikely to acknowledge, let alone

discuss, a movement encouraging them to use contraceptives.[3] They might, however, have used them anyway. Thus, when progressivism attacked problems related to sex, the focus was on venereal disease, advertising for abortifacients or prostitution. Assumptions included the evil nature of these three and the necessity of laws and sex education to prevent them. Neither laws nor education succeeded. Although, or perhaps because, progressivism tried to ignore sex and failed at efforts in related areas, Victorian values and behavior began to change in the twentieth century.

Socialism influenced progressivism and Victorian values and behavior. Like the dominant, more traditional wing of progressivism, socialists wanted more control of government for the people, but, unlike the dominant wing, socialists defined people only as industrial workers.[4] Socialist women hoped to improve the personal as well as the work life of Americans. Socialist women tackled the issue of contraception directly, but they received no support from socialist men, who controlled the movement, or from older socialist women. The Victorian social purity values were firmly entrenched. Lacking the support of the power structure, contraception never became part of the platform. The young socialists who were proponents of contraception joined other socialists who moved to anarchism when they perceived that even socialism would not provide a government to meet their own particular needs. Concerning sex, some socialists and most anarchists wanted legal and moral freedom to have intercourse and children outside of marriage and to use contraception whenever they wanted to.[5] These values and behavior were clearly in reaction to progressivism as well as Victorianism.[6]

Development

Roots of the radical responses to Victorianism and progressivism spread from the early nineteenth century. One of the responses, advocacy of birth control, appeared in an 1830 book by Robert Dale Owen called Moral Physiology.[7] Owen recommended withdrawal and opposed celibacy, partial withdrawal, the condom and the vaginal sponge.[8] This success occurred perhaps in part because Owen was the son of radicals who had started communal New Harmony, Indiana, where he grew up, and in part because Frances Wright, a woman of New Harmony, lectured widely on birth control among other feminist topics.[9]

Emma Goldman, a woman who represented both anarchism and medicine when she spoke in support of birth control, drew on the arguments of both groups. An anarchist in America well before she earned nursing and midwifery degrees in Vienna in 1896, she obtained her early contraceptive education in Paris in 1900. There, through anarchist connections, she attended an international Neo-Malthusian conference, watched demonstrations of contraceptives and received supplies and instructions to take back to America. Since her American lectures before Paris had included support for family limitation, her lectures after Paris were not much different. After Paris, though, she privately gave contraceptive information on request. She refused, however, to give that information in her lectures, lest she jeopardize all her political work by being arrested for only one aspect of it.[10]

No safer from the law were the new radical journals where contraceptive information started appearing in 1906. Mother Earth, published by Goldman, was the first of them to discuss the subject. John Coryell wrote, "Because of the Comstockery which has its felt grip upon our throats we may not instruct the little child in the way of health; or if it be said that there is nothing to

prevent the parent from instructing the child, yet it must be insisted that the parent has no means of knowing since Comstockery prescribes ignorance as the only way to innocence; and innocent our girls must be at any cost."[11]

Radical attorney Theodore Schroeder contributed to Altruria in 1907, writing that "now, with the enlargements of judicial construction, even scientific sex-literature of the highest order is suppressed if circulated among the laity, and its distribution even among professional men is only a matter of the prosecutor's courtesy in spite of the law, and not a matter of right under the law."[12] Voltairine de Cleyre supported contraception in a 1908 Mother Earth article. She wrote, "As to the effects of such normal gratification of normal appetite upon population, I would have them consciously controlled, as they can be, are to some extent now, and will be more and more through the progress of knowledge. The birth-rate of France and of native Americans gives evidence of such conscious control."[13]

While Schroeder blamed the laws and the courts for the press's problems with topics like contraception, Hippolyte Havel blamed the financial concerns of the press itself. In a Mother Earth article, he perceived newspaper publishers as unwilling to advocate unpopular ideas for fear no one would buy or advertise in their newspapers.[14] A writer in the new socialist magazine, Masses, written to attract liberals, said that socialism was the answer to the problems muckraking had created for newspapers.[15]

Margaret Sanger, a woman with some nursing training and experience and active membership in the Socialist Party, was among those who saw socialism as the answer to the world's problems. In 1911, she began writing articles in the New York Call, a socialist journal, about human reproduction. Her writing and speaking on the subject attracted many followers.[16] Sanger continued her

articles, as well as her radical politics, in 1912; extending her commitment from socialism to anarchism, she also became a member of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW).[17]

Challenges to the obscenity laws continued the next year in radical publications. Goldman wrote on contraception for the first time in Mother Earth. She said, "Morality and its victim, the mother--what a terrible picture! . . . Five thousand are yearly sacrificed upon the alter of this monster, that will not stand for prevention but would cure abortions. Five thousand soldiers in the battle for their physical and spiritual freedom, and as many thousands more who are crippled and mutilated rather than bring forth life in a society based on decay and destruction."[18] The many readers of Sanger's articles in the Call, however, eventually included Anthony Comstock, who objected to an explicit article on venereal diseases. As a result, that 1913 article did not appear, and the mostly blank column included the statement, "What Every Girl Should Know. NOTHING! By order of the Post Office Department."[19]

Sanger continued her political activism in 1913 and incorporated nursing work in New York tenements into her politics. She also researched contraception because she intended to inform her patients, who wanted to limit their families. Unsuccessful in her research, she and her family went to France where, IWW leader Bill Haywood had told her, she could find everything she needed. Within a few months of her arrival, Sanger had obtained the contraceptive information and devices she sought.[20]

While her artist husband, William, remained in France to paint, she and her children returned to New York in early 1914.[21] Immediately, she began putting together a radical monthly journal, Woman Rebel, the purpose of which was to inspire women, especially poor women, to anarchistic revolt. The first issue,

published in March, included an article by Goldman opposing marriage and supporting "fewer and better children" and an article by Sanger discussing contraception and implying that future issues of the journal might include a discussion of methods. Sanger wrote, "As is well known, a law exists forbidding the imparting of information on this subject, the penalty being several years' imprisonment. Is it not time to defy this law? And what fitter place could be found than in the pages of the WOMAN REBEL?" Most of the first issue, however, covered other aspects of revolution, especially the labor movement.[22]

On April 3, Sanger received a letter from post office authorities which announced that the March issue was unmailable according to the state criminal code. When she went to the post office, she found copies to only half her mailing list confiscated. Using a number of mailboxes to escape detection, she mailed new copies to those subscribers. Her own letters to the authorities requesting the names of the objectionable articles elicited only copies of the original post office letter.[23]

The April issue did not mention contraception, but the May issue included relevant articles: one by Ethel Cole advocated artificial methods and even sanctioned abortion, and one by Elizabeth Keen again implied that Woman Rebel would discuss methods.[24] The post office suppressed the May issue more successfully than it had the March.[25] Masses's editor Max Eastman devoted most of a column to criticizing the new journal for "a rather unconvincing excitedness and intolerance" but ended with praise: "we must thank Margaret Sanger for speaking out clearly and quietly for popular education in the means of preventing conception."[26]

The June issue included nothing about contraception, and, before the July issue appeared, changes occurred. Newspapers panned the new journal, and some

supporters backed out. Sanger and several of her helpers--Otto Bobsein, Ed Mylius and Robert Parker--met to plan, and they agreed on the need for a name to replace contraception. Parker suggested birth control, which everyone liked.[27] The group also organized the Birth Control League of America to educate workers about birth control and to lobby for repeal of anti-birth control laws.[28] The July issue contained an article announcing the formation of the League and an article by Sanger discussing the physical safety of birth control methods. She wrote, "There are . . . harmless preventives, which, when used, have a temporary effect, and when the woman later desires a child she will be in condition to have one . . . the stupidity of Comstock as well as the 'morality' of the Post Office censors, shall never prevent your knowing these preventive means."[29]

The August issue did not mention the subject. In August, however, Sanger received a subpoena to appear in court on August 25 to be arraigned for mailing the March, May and July issues of Woman Rebel.[30] Writing again to post office officials, she finally received an answer naming the offensive articles, most about contraception, the most offensive about the safety of methods.[31] At her arraignment in federal district court for violating the federal obscenity laws, Sanger obtained a six-week postponement from Judge Hazel to prepare her defense.[32]

Instead, she used those six weeks to put out a September-October issue of Woman Rebel and to produce the pamphlet called Family Limitation. The journal issue included articles on the indictment, an excerpt from an address by American Medical Association (AMA) President Abraham Jacobi supporting contraception, a letter from James F. Morton, Jr., a physician and long-time contraception proponent, and a definition of birth control.[33] It was the last

issue. The pamphlet was comprised of the material she had gathered in France the previous autumn. After numerous rejections, she found a radical printer, Bill Shatoff, who secretly produced 100,000 copies, which she sent to radical organizations around the country for release at her signal.[34]

Refusing legal help from Schroeder and Leonard Abbott of the Free Speech League, Sanger missed her October 5 court date, appeared on October 6, obtained another postponement, eight days, appeared on October 13, obtained another eight-day postponement, then decided to leave the country and go to England.[35] Although she was out of the country in November, radical publications expressed support for her.[36]

In England, she made contact with the Drysdales, a family of physicians who had been active in the birth control movement since its vigorous English beginnings in 1876. They shared their library with her and encouraged her meeting with Havelock Ellis, an expert on sexuality and a long-time birth control advocate. He guided her studies in the British Museum. Sanger also traveled to Holland, where birth control clinics had long flourished with the encouragement of the government.[37] She became an expert on birth control, both to defend herself at her New York trial and to continue her work in America.

While in Europe, Sanger kept in touch with her fellow anarchists in America. A three-page letter of hers published in the April Mother Earth reported on the events of the Woman Rebel case and complained about the delay until November of the coverage of that case in the radical press. The letter said, "There was no information concerning the prevention of conception given in the columns of my papers; consequently the only things the case was based on were the questions or articles . . . which advocated the prevention of conception . . . I expect very little publicity on this 'delicate subject' from

the capitalist press, but naturally I look for an attitude of solidarity and comradeship from the radical press." Below her letter, a note from Goldman explained the delay and expressed support. The note said, "Under the circumstances it seems very unfair on the part of our comrade to accuse MOTHER EARTH of indifference."[38]

Sanger had hardly been gone a month when her husband, William, who had returned to work in his studio on his arrival in New York, received a visitor there on December 19. Because the man said he was a friend of Margaret's in search of a copy of Family Limitation, Sanger looked among her possessions, stored in his studio. Finding a copy, he gave it to the grateful Mr. Heller.[39] On January 19, Comstook himself arrested Sanger in his studio for violating the state penal code.[40]

Out on five hundred dollars bail the next day, Sanger prepared for his court case. Ironically, Margaret Sanger would have preferred her own case to be about Family Limitation rather than Woman Rebel; she wanted to challenge the part of the obscenity laws, whether state or federal, which specifically concerned the giving of contraceptive information. Instead, William Sanger, who not only had been out of the country while she wrote the pamphlet but also had not participated in the birth control movement, would challenge that specific part of the law.

An active socialist for many years, Sanger could count on the legal and financial support of the radical community in his court case. By February, the Free Speech League, under the presidency of Leonard Abbott, began fundraising for him.[41] March 15 was his assigned court date in the Court of Special Sessions; however, Sanger and his radical attorney, Gilbert Roe, appeared instead before Judge Swann in the Court of General Sessions on that date to

appeal for a jury trial. Swann called the contraception pamphlet "simply awful" and described its diagrams as "obscene." Sanger's appeal was denied that month, and he appealed again, this time to the Appellate Division of the state Supreme Court.[42]

The publicity about both Sangers' legal activities resulted in more press coverage and increased activity in the birth control movement. The local chapters of the Birth Control League of America were active, and a new organization, the National Birth Control League, had begun in March. With the goal of removing the anticontraception parts from the obscenity laws, the organizers--Mary Ware Dennett, Clara Gruening Stillman and Anita Block--used the Woman Rebel mailing list but were most successful among society women.[43] Meanwhile, Emma Goldman decided to take a more activist role in the birth control movement. She gave a lecture which six hundred well-to-do people attended on March 28; she discussed methods of birth control but was not arrested.[44] Coverage of the movement in the radical press began to include political cartoons. One is a two-page spread of Theodore Roosevelt pointing at an empty cradle and telling a woman near him, "BREED!" Clouds labeled "WAR" are in the background. A second cartoon is a full page showing a woman carrying an infant to a river with the caption below, "Family Limitation--Old Style."[45] On the west coast, a co-worker wrote to Margaret Sanger that only middle- and upper-class women were joining the local birth control organizations.[46] A change in the audience of the movement was beginning.

June 18, the date of William Sanger's rescheduled trial in Special Sessions, passed, and on July 16 his second appeal for a jury trial was dismissed by the Appellate Division because the decision was not appealable. His trial was rescheduled for September 3, and then for September 10.[47]

During the summer, Emma Goldman and a fellow anarchist, Benjamin Reitman, began a speaking tour to publicize Mother Earth, anarchism and birth control. In Portland, Oregon, they were arrested on August 6 for distributing birth control information. Tried and convicted the next day in municipal court, they appealed to the circuit court, where Judge Gatens dismissed the charges for insufficient evidence. "The trouble with our people today is that there is too much prudery," he said, explaining his own public proselytizing as a member of the Oregon Hygiene Association.[48] Lecturing on contraception and collecting money for Margaret Sanger, Goldman and Reitman continued East on their tour.[49]

They returned to New York in time for William Sanger's September 10 trial, which received detailed coverage in the radical press. Acting as his own attorney, Sanger appeared in court before Judges McInerney, Salmon and Herbert, the first presiding. With an audience of supporters, many of whom were turned away, Sanger refused to cross-examine witnesses, produce his own witnesses or answer questions. He spent most of his time trying to read a prepared statement. McInerney spent most of his time trying to prevent Sanger from reading his statement. After much shouting between Comstock and Sanger and between McInerney and Sanger, the three judges examined the pamphlet, Family Limitation, and McInerney announced the guilty verdict. He also said that Sanger was crazy and a menace to society; he urged suffragettes to advocate having children instead of the vote. Sanger was given a choice of a $150 fine or thirty days in jail. Choosing the latter, he said, "I would rather be in jail for my conviction than to be free at a loss of my manhood and my self-respect." The spectators began cheering, applauding, standing on the benches and ignoring McInerney's pounding gavel. Officers took Sanger to jail, and the court finally cleared.[50]

Two weeks later, Margaret Sanger returned to New York from England, a week before her husband's release from jail. She immediately began a search for financial support. Both the Academy of Medicine and the National Birth Control League refused her requests. Neither group wanted involvement with someone breaking laws; both groups wanted only to change the laws.[51] Before Sanger could continue her search, however, her daughter Peggy died of pneumonia. The news of her death and of Sanger's return to face trial made a tragic heroine of Sanger in the eyes of Americans to whom birth control had become a subject of public discussion in her absence. As a result, the money she sought finally began arriving, in small, individual contributions, mailed from around the country and the world.[52]

The radical press took a political and anecdotal perspective on birth control, which involved reporting on the activities of radicals in the movement and the basis in political philosophy of those activities. All of the coverage was favorable; it reported on the heroes and martyrs of the movement and explained how they were fighting for the freedom of all Americans to control their own fertility. Opponents of contraception, especially the government, were evil enemies.

Establishment

In January, 1916, Margaret Sanger informed the readers of Emma Goldman's Mother Earth that Sanger's pending court case was merely for advocating birth control in Woman Rebel, not for distributing birth control information. Sanger wrote, "When my case is called in the Federal courts I shall enter a plea of 'not guilty,' in order to separate the idea of prevention of conception and birth control from the sphere of pornography, from the gutter of slime and filth where the lily-livered legislators have placed it, under the direction of the late unlamented Anthony Comstock, and in which the forces of reaction are still

attempting to hold it."[53] Goldman herself delivered two lectures on birth control the next month. On February 4, she spoke to three thousand people, and, on February 8, she again faced a large audience. Three days later, the city police arrested her for giving out contraceptive information. Even before her preliminary hearing on February 28, a protest meeting occurred in Seattle, Washington. At the hearing, although she had no attorney, her case was scheduled for trial in the Court of Special Sessions.[54]

Birth control proponents began a publicity campaign for Goldman. On March 1, they held a meeting at Carnegie Hall, at which well known proponents of contraception William J. Robinson, A. L. Goldwater and Theodore Schroeder were among the speakers. Despite the large crowd, many of whom stood, the meeting lasted for four hours.[55] On March 10, a protest meeting occurred in San Francisco, where several hundred people gathered, received contraceptive information and contributed money for Goldman's defense fund.[56] Mother Earth published five- and eight-page articles on the history and philosophy of the movement, and Masses asked for support for Goldman. One Masses's article said, "Emma Goldman now bears the brunt of the reactionary attack on knowledge and liberty."[57]

In the meantime, the prosecutors asked to have the charges against Sanger dismissed, and the judge agreed.[58] Thus, Goldman was the only birth control defendant when her trial was first called on March 29, continued to April 5, and then completed on April 20, when she was found guilty and sentenced to fifteen days in jail or a one hundred dollar fine. She chose the former. As at William Sanger's trial, the court was packed with supporters, and the trial itself was a verbal battle between Goldman and the judges and between Goldman and the

prosecutors.[59] On April 19, the evening before the sentencing, her supporters gave a dinner in her honor at the Hotel Brevoort. More than two hundred people attended, listening to speeches and watching Rosa Pastor Stokes distribute birth control information without being arrested.[60] On May 5, when Goldman was released from jail, another Carnegie Hall protest meeting greeted her.[61]

While Goldman was in jail, Ben Reitman, one of her supporters, was arrested for giving out contraceptive information. He appeared for his hearing on April 28 and was bound over for trial on May 8. Serving as his own attorney, Reitman attempted to discuss the philosophy of birth control with the judges. He was found guilty and sentenced to sixty days in jail. The judges seemed particularly upset that he was a physician deliberately breaking the law.[62] In support of him, an outdoor demonstration occurred May 20 at Union Square, at which Jessie Ashley and Ida Rauh Eastman handed out birth control information, for which they, as well as Bolton Hall, were later arrested.[63]

Birth control activities occurred around the country in 1916. Goldman was the guest at a birth control meeting attended by about six hundred people in Cleveland in June. She also spoke in Denver in June. In Portland, Oregon, Carl Rave, who had rewritten and distributed Sanger's Family Limitation pamphlet for a year with no problems, was arrested in September. Mother Earth also covered in detail Van Allison's trial in Boston. The report emphasized that the judge tried to get Allison to name the married women to whom he had spoken about contraception. John Sumner, an associate of Comstock's, wrote against birth control in a radical journal, Fra. He encouraged self-control because contraception "is very likely to breed a race of imbecile devitalized adults all of whose babies in time would be defectives."[64]

Despite events around the country, New York remained the center of birth control activity. Mother Earth covered in detail Judge Wadhams' advice to a defendant that she and her husband use birth control. Goldman wrote of the defendant, "It was certainly worth going to jail to teach a Judge the importance of Birth Control for the masses of people." Meanwhile, Bolton Hall went on trial on October 20 for distributing contraceptive information at the Union Square protest meeting. He was acquitted. On the way out of the building, Goldman was arrested for the same activity, despite the results of Hall's trial and the fact that she could have been arrested when he was.

Her arraignment was October 27, and she was bound over for trial. Jessie Ashley's trial was October 30, and she was found guilty. She chose the fifty-dollar fine over ten days in jail and prepared for appeal. Sanger announced to December Masses readers her new journal, Birth Control Review.[65]

In 1917, Masses reported several events in the birth control movement but devoted only one article to the subject. Sanger's arrest and November 3, 1916 arraignment for opening a birth control clinic, Jessie Ashley's conviction, Bolton Hall's acquittal, Emma Goldman's arrest and Van Allison's arrest were the legal activities covered. The report, by Ashley, also mentioned twenty operating birth control leagues and Judge Wadhams' suggestion of contraception to a defendant, as well as related activities by the New York County Medical Association, the American Public Health Association and the Women's City Club. Ashley wrote, "The movement for Birth Control is a strictly illegal success . . . the more frankly the law is defied the more rapidly do the women of America come forward with approval . . . Perhaps it may soon be a crime in the eyes of the law to have too many children, just as it is a crime in the eyes of humanity now."[66]

Emma Goldman reported in Mother Earth on her most recent speaking tour, during which Ben Reitman was arrested in Cleveland and in Rochester, New York. She looked forward on her return to New York to her trial January 8 stemming from the Union Square meeting the previous spring. Goldman also wrote that "there is no element in all of society so hopelessly stagnant as the idle, parasitic, sheltered females of the middle class." Reitman reported on his trials in the two cities: he preferred the judge in Rochester to the one in Cleveland, as the latter held him for trial and fined him for contempt when his lawyer appeared alone, while the former dismissed one charge entirely. At his Rochester trial, the jury acquitted him after deliberating several minutes. Reitman wrote about his final statement to the Cleveland judge, "I told him that no matter what he or any jury should say, the birth control propaganda would go on and that as long as there are laws which interfere with people acquiring knowledge or living a free, harmonious life, I and others would defy such laws and take the consequences."[67]

In 1917, birth control was the subject of several articles in radical publications. Writing in Mother Earth, Luigi d'Joinville saw contraception among the poor as the "only real cure for crime, insanity, drunkenness, drugs and prostitution." Charles W. Eliot, on the other hand, said in the Delineator that "one can not but feel astonishment and dismay that any normal woman should ever prefer any other mode of life to the life of the mother of a good-sized family. For a healthy and vigorous woman, motherhood is the most intellectual, developing and satisfactory of lives. Its duties are lofty, its affections tender, its hopes expansive, and its joys deep and lasting. No other life can compare with it. The preservation of any race depends on its women preferring motherhood to any other pursuit." Goldman discussed contraception in several of her essays in Anarchism and Other Essays, in which she espoused motherhood

outside of marriage and opposed Puritanism. An editorial in A Voice in the Wilderness pointed out the contradiction in supporting wars but calling birth control "murder." The author concluded sarcastically, "Oh, this world has some fine thinkers and fine moralists."[68]

Only Sanger's new journal, Birth Control Review, provided regular coverage of the movement in 1917. Other radical publications may have turned that job over to her. Five issues appeared that first year. They included detailed coverage of related court cases and of movement activities around the country, with an emphasis on eugenics. Bibliographies and histories of the movement appeared, as did book reviews and editorials. Sanger and her managing editor, Frederick A. Blossom, late of the Cleveland Birth Control League, published the Review in February, March, April-May, June and December of 1917.[68]

By 1918, the only radical publication printing anything about birth control was Birth Control Review. Besides printing the regular news of the movement, the Review published a compilation, by Judge Ruppenthal, of state laws on contraception. Although stating that the article was from Medical World, the Review changed the title from "Criminal Statutes on Birth Control" to "Legal Barriers of State and Nation."[70]

In 1919, A Voice in the Wilderness printed a two-paragraph editorial on birth control, which it referred to as "one of the most important measures for the salvation of mankind."[71] On a related issue, another journal, Public, discussed what it considered an unconstitutional state court decision in Tennessee upholding a contempt citation against a newspaper editor. The Memphis Press had printed an editorial critical of corrupt judges, and one local judge running for office had decided that he was the real subject of the editorial. Public said of the contempt law, "As a muffler of the press it is in a class all

its own."[72] Decisions like these no doubt influenced the press coverage of birth control cases as well, because the press would have been hesitant to print criticism of the court or testimony in such cases.

Margaret Sanger's book, What Every Girl Should Know, appeared in print in 1920, the only radical publication related to birth control in 1920. Like the original series in the Call, the book had a page which said, "What every girl should know: NOTHING! by order of the Post Office Department." The book discussed contraception only indirectly: "Women should protest against the so-called medical secret which decrees that they be kept in ignorance where their health, as well as life, is directly concerned." Sanger concluded her book with a passage urging the abolition of capitalism as the only way to save women.[73]

Conclusions

While today proponents of birth control, now called family planning, skillfully use the general press in sophisticated public relations campaigns, early in the century advocates of contraception had little access to the general press. And where the press and publicity went, Comstock and the police were likely to follow. So birth control proponents used and created their own publications, the radical press.

Virtually all of the radical press coverage of birth control was favorable; it reported in great detail on the heroes and martyrs of the movement and explained how they were fighting for the freedom of all Americans to control their own fertility. For example, coverage of Emma Goldman's arrest on February 11 included news of a protest meeting in Seattle, and coverage of Goldman's trial included the details of the verbal battles she fought with the judge and with the prosecutors. In the radical press, contraception was, variously, "the salvation of mankind," a health-saver and a life-saver. Opponents of contraception, especially the government, were evil enemies. A clear example

was the change from "Criminal Statutes" to "Legal Barriers" as the heading over a list of laws in Birth Control Review.

The radical press covered the birth control movement with a political and anecdotal perspective, which involved not only reporting on the activities of radicals in the movement but also the basis in political philosophy of those activities. Although radical press coverage of birth control waned around 1918, that may have been because Margaret Sanger's Birth Control Review took over and provided such thorough coverage. Not until Birth Control Review began using eugenics arguments and appealing to middle-class and wealthy people did the radical press lose its cohesiveness. By then, however, birth control was no longer a radical idea, and socialists and anarchists were involved in other issues.

The true context of the movement received media attention in the radical press. Progressivism, a product of Victorian values, did not go beyond them. The progressive movement as inherently conservative in its attempts to make American institutions function properly served as a catalyst for the anarchistic rebellion of the birth control movement. The radical press recognized contraception as antagonistic to progressivism rather than accepting it as a delayed part or result of progressivism. That press perceived progressivism as dealing with only the symptoms, as opposed to the causes, of poverty.

In covering the birth control movement, the press skillfully and in some cases unconsciously mixed its roles of informer and persuader. While the professional, popular and government presses would probably have claimed to be informing their audiences objectively about birth control, the radical press would probably have acknowledged that it was persuading its audience to support and use birth control. The professional, popular and government presses would probably also have agreed with the radical press about its function. On the

other hand, the radical press would probably have disagreed with the other presses about their role; the radical press would probably have perceived them as persuading their audience not to use or support birth control, which explains the existence of the radical press in the first place.[74]

And, in retrospect, persuasion as the role of the press in covering birth control seems valid. This perception hinges in part on the relationship between the informing and persuading functions and in part on the factors influencing decisions about what to publish. The personal values of the writers, editors and publishers, their professional values and the information available to them controlled their use or non-use of specific information. This control determined their role as persuaders, although they also functioned as informers. Because they informed only as much as they thought beneficial, however, their informer role only supplemented their persuader role.

Notes

[1]U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Twelfth Decennial Census, Proportion of Children in the United States, 1905, Bulletin, No. 22; U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900: Vital Statistics, 4; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910: Population, 1; and U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940, Vital Statistics Rates in the United States 1900-1940.

[2]Benjamin Parke De Witt, The Progressive Movement (New York: Macmillan, 1915; reprint ed., Seattle: University of Washington, [1968]), p. 90; Cary and Weinberg, "Paradoxes of Progressivism," in The Social Fabric: American Life from the Civil War to the Present, 2d ed., ed. John H. Cary and Julius Weinberg (Boston: Little, Brown, 1978 [1975]), p. 127; Robert H. Wiebe, The Search for Order 1877-1920, The Making of America (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), pp. 198-9; John G. Clark et al., Three Generations in Twentieth Century America: Family, Community, and Nation (Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey, 1977), pp. 98-104; Henry F. May, The End of American Innocence (New York: Knopf, 1959), p. 69; and Robert M. Crunden, Ministers of Reform: The Progressives' Achievement in American Civilization, 1889-1920 (New York: Basic Books, 1982), pp. ix-x.

[3]The word "Victorian," originally used to describe values and behavior in England during the reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901), is now used by many writers to describe those values and behavior wherever they occurred in the Western world during Victoria's reign. Thus, their spread to the United States has resulted in American values and behavior in that period being labeled "Victorian." That is the use of the word in this paper.

[4]De Witt, pp. 90-1, 98-9; Wiebe, p. 293.

[5]May, pp. 231-2, 303-10; Linda Gordon, Woman's Body, Woman's Right: A Social History of Birth Control in America (New York: Penguin, 1977), pp. 208-11; Carl N. Degler, At Odds: Women and the Family in America from the Revolution to the Present (New York: Oxford University, 1980), p. 199; Peter Gay, The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud, Vol. 1: Education of the Senses (New York: Oxford University, 1984), p. 273; and Mari Jo Buhle, Women and American Socialism, 1870-1920 (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1981), pp. 249, 268, 270-1, 274, 279.

[6]May, p. 220.

[7]Hal D. Sears, The Sex Radicals: Free Love in High Victorian America (Lawrence, Kan.: Regents, 1977), p. 128.

[8]Robert Dale Owen, Moral Physiology (n.p., n.d.), reprinted in Birth Control and Morality in Nineteenth Century America: Two Discussions (New York: Arno and New York Times, 1972), pp. 36-39.

[9]Annie G. Porritt, "A Pioneer for Birth Control," Birth Control Review 10 (September 1926): 274-5; Ditzion, pp. 85-94; and Celia Morris Eckhardt, Fanny Wright: Rebel in America (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1984), passim.

[10]Richard Drinnon, Rebel in Paradise: A Biography of Emma Goldman (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1961), pp. 65, 67, 166-7; "What the Goldman Woman Stands For," Portland Oregonian, 25 May 1908, p. 6.

[11]John R. Coryell, "Comstockery," Mother Earth 1 (March 1906): 39.

[12]Schroeder, "The Evolution of Comstockery," Altruria 1 (March 1907): 16.

[13]Voltairine de Cleyre, "They Who Marry Do Ill," Mother Earth 2 (January 1908): 504.

[14]Hippolyte Havel, "The Career of a Journalist: A Confession," Mother Earth 3 (August 1908): 255-9.

[15]Ellis O. Jones, "Magazines, Morgan and Muckraking," Masses 1 (April 1911): 10, 18; Genevieve Taggart, ed., May Days: An Anthology of Verse from "Masses-Liberator" (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1925), pp. 1-15.

[16]These followers included Mabel Dodge Luhan, a wealthy hostess to New York radicals, who remembered Sanger as "the first person I ever knew who was openly an ardent propagandist for the joys of the flesh," as well as of contraception. Mabel Dodge Luhan, Intimate Memoirs, vol. 3: Movers and Shakers (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1936), pp. 69-71.

[17]Madeline Gray, Margaret Sanger: A Biography of the Champion of Birth Control (New York: Marek, 1979), p. 47.

[18]Emma Goldman, "Victims of Morality," Mother Earth 8 (March 1913): 23.

[19]Lawrence Lader, The Margaret Sanger Story and the Fight for Birth Control (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1955), pp. 36-42; Gray, pp. 40-3; Emily Taft Douglas, Margaret Sanger: Pioneer of the Future (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), pp. 26-7; and David Kennedy, Birth Control in America: The Career of Margaret Sanger (New Haven: Yale University, 1970), pp. 11-16.

[20]Gray, pp. 59-61; Lader, pp. 43, 48-51.

[21]Lader, p. 51.

[22]Woman Rebel 1 (March 1914).

[23]Lader, pp. 52-5.

[24]Woman Rebel 1 (May 1914).

[25]Gray, p. 70.

[26]Max Eastman, "The Woman Rebel," Masses 5 (May 1914): 5.

[27]Gray, pp. 71-2.

[28]Douglas, p. 50; "The Birth Control League," Woman Rebel 1 (July 1914): 39.

[29]Woman Rebel 1 (July 1914).

[30]"Indictment," Woman Rebel 1 (September-October 1914): 49.

[31]Gray, p. 76.

[32]Lader, p. 47; Gray, p. 76; Kennedy, p. 24; and "Indictment," Woman Rebel 1 (September-October 1914): 49.

[33]"Indictment," Woman Rebel 1 (September-October 1914): 49.

[34]Gray, pp. 77-8; Lader, pp. 55-6.

[35]Arranging for her children's care, she went to Canada after she had taken care of three matters: writing to her husband, who had just returned from Paris to avoid the war; writing to Judge Hazel and the prosecuting attorney; and arranging letters of introduction to European radicals. She spent two weeks visiting radical friends in Canada and receiving a visit from her husband. With a forged Canadian passport, she left for England on November 3, intending to support herself with two sources of income: European sales of Woman Rebel and Family Limitation, boxes of which she took with her, and American sales of the latter, whose release she arranged, with the understanding that the money be sent to her in London. Gray, pp. 79-81.

[36]Harry Breckenridge, "The Persecution of Margaret Sanger," Mother Earth 9 (November 1914): 296-7; "Margaret Sanger," Masses 6 (November 1914): 20.

[37]Lader, pp. 64-7; Douglas, pp. 66-9, 81-5; and Gray, pp. 105-7.

[38]Sanger, "A Letter from Margaret Sanger," Mother Earth 10 (April 1915): 75-8.

[39]Eastman, "Is the Truth Obscene?" Masses 6 (March 1915): 5; International Neo-Malthusian Bureau of Correspondence and Defense, Memorandum concerning the prosecution of Mrs. Margaret H. Sanger of New York, U.S.A., for

her advocacy of Birth Control and her issue of a Pamphlet entitled "Family Limitation" describing various methods of restricting families (London: The Bureau, [1915]), pp. 1-2.

[40]Delaying their arrival at the police station, Comstock stopped for a restaurant meal and attempted to negotiate a plea in exchange for information about Sanger's wife. Sanger refused and spent the night following his arraignment in jail, too late to arrange for a lawyer or bail that day. Lader, pp. 80-1; Douglas, pp. 80-1; and Eastman, "Is the Truth Obscene?" Masses 6 (March 1915): 5-6.

[41]Leonard D. Abbott, "The Sanger Case," Mother Earth 9 (February 1915): 379-80; Abbott, "The Status of the Sanger Case," Mother Earth 10 (March 1915): 451-2; "Announcement," Masses 6 (March 1915): 16; and "Progressor Comstock," Masses 6 (April 1915): 23-4.

[42]Abbott, "Is William Sanger to Go to Jail," Masses 6 (September 1915): 19.

[43]Mary Ware Dennett, Birth Control Laws: Shall We Keep Them, Change Them, or Abolish Them? (New York: Grafton, 1926), pp. 67, 280-2; Douglas, p. 88; Lader, p. 114; and "Birth Control," Masses 6 (May 1915): 20.

[44]Drinnon, p. 167.

[45]Goldman, "Limitation of Offspring," Mother Earth 10 (July 1915): 191-2; "Family Limitation--Old Style," Masses 6 (May 1915): 19; Elsie Clews Parsons, "Facing Race Suicide," Masses 6 (June 1915): 15; Eastman, "Revolutionary Birth-Control," Masses 6 (July 1915): 21-2; "BREED!" Masses 8 (December 1915): 14-15; and "The Question of Birth Control," Masses 6 (June 1915): 21-2.

[46]Gray, p. 105.

[47]"The Sanger Case," Mother Earth 10 (June 1915): 135; Abbott, "The Conviction of William Sanger," Mother Earth 10 (October 1915): 268; and Abbott, "Is William Sanger to Go to Jail?" Masses 6 (September 1915): 19.

[48]Louise Bryant, "A New Adventure in Arcadia," Mother Earth 10 (September 1915): 235-8; Drinnon, p. 167.

[49]Drinnon, pp. 167-8.

[50]Floyd Dell, "Criminals All," Masses 6 (November 1915): 21; Abbott, "The Conviction of William Sanger," Mother Earth 10 (October 1915): 268-71.

[51]Lader, p. 85; Gray, p. 114; and Douglas, pp. 88-9.

[52]Douglas, p. 89; Gray, p. 115.

[53]Sanger, "Not Guilty!" Mother Earth 10 (January 1916): 365.

[54]Emma Goldman, "My Arrest and Preliminary Hearing," Mother Earth 11 (March 1916): 426-30; Goldman, "An Urgent Appeal to My Friends," Mother Earth 11 (April 1916): 450-1.

[55]"The Most Atrocious Law--Extracts From Addresses Made At The Carnegie Hall Meeting," Mother Earth 11 (April 1916): 457-60; "Abstract of Dr. A. L. Goldwater's Speech," Mother Earth 11 (April 1916): 460-3; "Abstract of Theodore Schroeder's Speech," Mother Earth 11 (April 1916): 463-7; Harold Titus, "The Carnegie Hall Meeting," Mother Earth 11 (April 1916): 483-6; and Richard Drinnon, Rebel in Paradise: A Biography of Emma Goldman (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1961), p. 168.

[56]Reb Raney, "The Crowbar vs. Words," Mother Earth 11 (April 1916): 479-80.

[57]Leonard D. Abbott, "The Historical Side of the Birth Control Movement," Mother Earth 11 (April 1916): 451-6; Goldman, "The Social Aspects of Birth Control," Mother Earth 11 (April 1916): 468-75; "Birth Control and Emma Goldman," Masses 8 (May 1916): 15; and "Birth Control," Masses 8 (April 1916): 25.

[58]"Birth Control," Masses 8 (April 1916): 25; "A Letter From Margaret Sanger," Mother Earth 11 (April 1916): 492-3; and Raney, "The Meaning of Margaret Sanger's Stand," Blast 1 (12 February 1916): 2.

[59]Drinnon, pp. 168-9; "Emma Goldman's Defense," Masses 8 (June 1916): 27; "Emma Goldman's Trial on April 5th," Mother Earth 11 (April 1916): 467; "Emma Goldman Before the Bar," Mother Earth 11 (May 1916): 496-503; and Abbott, "Reflections on Emma Goldman's Trial," Mother Earth 11 (May 1916): 504-7.

[60]Robert Morris, "The Free Speech and Birth Control Dinner," Mother Earth 11 (May 1916): 518-20; Drinnon, p. 168.

[61]"The Second Carnegie Hall Meeting," Mother Earth 11 (June 1916): 522-5; Drinnon, p. 169; and "Birth-Control," Masses 8 (July 1916): 27.

[62]Ben L. Reitman, "Pinched," Mother Earth 11 (May 1916): 507-8; "Ben L. Reitman Before the Bar," Mother Earth 11 (June 1916): 508-16; "Birth-Control," Masses p. 27; and Sara Bard Field, "A Birth-Control Meditation," Blast 1 (15 December 1916): 3.

[63]"Birth-Control," Masses 8 (July 1916): 27; "Birth Control Demonstration in Union Square," Mother Earth 11 (June 1916): 525-7; "Birth Control," Masses 8 (October 1917): 10; and "Mr. Bolton Hall's Case," Mother Earth 11 (July 1916): 538-9.

[64]R. G., "The Meeting in Cleveland," Mother Earth 11 (July 1916): 549-50; Ellen A. Kennan, "Emma Goldman in Denver," Mother Earth 11 (July 1916): 550; Harriet T. Chervin, "Birth Control Propaganda in Oregon," Mother Earth 11 (October 1916): 641-3; "Observations and Comments," Mother Earth 11 (August 1916): 562-3; and John S. Sumner, "The Suppression of Vice," Fra (September 1916): 198-9.

[65]Goldman, "Again the Birth Control Agitation," Mother Earth 11 (November 1916): 669-72; "Mrs. Sanger's Magazine," Masses 9 (December 1916): 36.

[66]Jessie Ashley, "Successful Law Breaking," Masses 9 (January 1917): 16-17.

[67]Goldman, "Despite Jehovah and the Police," Mother Earth 11 (January 1917): 730-3; Reitman, "The Cleveland Myth," Mother Earth 11 (February 1917): 761-6; and Harry Weinberger, "Reitman and Rochester," Mother Earth 12 (April 1917): 44-6.

[68]Luigi A. d'Joinville, "Necessity of Birth Control Propaganda," Mother Earth 12 (April 1917): 53-5; Charles W. Eliot, "The Small Family: Its Causes and Consequences," Delineator 90 (March 1917): 14, 40; Goldman, "The Hyprocrisy of Puritanism," in Anarchism and Other Essays, 3d rev. ed. (New York: Mother Earth, 1917): pp. 178-9; Goldman, "Marriage and Love," in Anarchism and Other Essays, 3d rev. ed. (New York: Mother Earth, 1917), pp. 242-5; and "Birth Control and War," Voice in the Wilderness 1 (October 1917): 29.

[69]Birth Control Review 1 (February 1917), (March 1917), (April-May 1917), (June 1917), (December 1917); Linda Gordon, Woman's Body, Woman's Right: A Social History of Birth Control in America (New York: Penguin, 1977), pp. 274-90.

[70]J. C. Ruppenthal, "Legal Barriers of State and Nation," Birth Control Review 2 (October 1918): 10-13, 16.

[71]"Birth Control," Voice in the Wilderness 2 (July 1919): 37.

[72]E. C. Rodgers, "Tennessee Courts and the Freedom of the Press," Public 22 (16 August 1919): 877-8.

[73]Sanger, What Every Girl Should Know (New York: Maisel, 1920; reprint ed., New York: Belvedere, 1980), pp. 65-7, 80-1.

[74]Lauren Kessler, The Dissident Press: Alternative Journalism in American History (Beverly Hills, California: Sage, 1984), pp. 155, 158-9.